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The Relations of New Testament Study to the Present Age

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THE RELATIONS OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDY TO THE PRESENT AGE.

IN assuming the duties of the chair, to which these exercises officially inaugurate me, I cannot overlook the peculiar importance of its history. During the first fifty-three years of its life this Seminary has had but two Professors of New Testament Exegesis. The first of these, the venerable Dr. Thompson, one of the founders of the institution, is still with us. I cannot tell how much his presence enhances the solemnity of this hour to me. It must certainly remind us all of the original intent and purpose of those who labored and sacrificed for the successful founding of the Seminary. I am sure I express the sentiment of us all when I say, long may he abide with us, not only to link the present with the past, but also to take part in the work of consolidating and enlarging the usefulness of the institution. The second teacher of New Testament Exegesis, and properly the first incumbent of the Hosmer Professorship, was the able teacher and eminent scholar, Dr. Matthew B. Riddle. Were it customary for incoming occupants of Seminary professorships to speak extensively of their predecessors, as it is, for example, for members of the National Academy of France on taking their seats in that august body, we would find enough to occupy us profitably this hour in recounting the public labors of one whose work, through the Committee of Revision and independently, cannot fail to form a permanent factor in New Testament scholarship in this country.

But we are here not to magnify the chair of New Testament Exegesis in this Seminary, nor to speak of the work of predecessors. Nor on the other hand are we here to take an encyclopædic view of our department, and to trace out its relations to the other branches of the theological curriculum. We are here rather to face a duty. An inscrutable Providence through a series of many steps has led us to unite our efforts in a common work. We are to ask and answer the questions, what that work is, and what it demands of us. In order to

be specific I shall limit myself to the answer as found in the consideration of the subject: The Relation of New Testament Study to the Present Age. I shall try to speak briefly of the function and office of the New Testament interpreter, of how it is affected by the movements and conditions round about us, and how it proposes to influence them in return.

Exegesis is a science and an art; and, in the ordinary acceptation, the term includes not merely the actual interpretation of literary and other productions, but also all preparatory steps looking towards such interpretation. We may be allowed on this occasion to speak of it in a general and comprehensive way without distinguishing between its parts.

On the assumption that the Bible is in a true sense the product of a supernatural influence — the Word of God — not a mere body of literature and, as such, the product of the human mind — for then it would hardly be worth our while to undertake its study, its interpretation, and dissemination on as large a scale as we are doing — on this assumption it will be seen that there is a striking resemblance, amounting to a perfect analogy, between the spheres of Natural Science and of Biblical Science; the one is occupied with the investigation of Nature — the Work of God — with the design of lifting up man as a physical and intellectual being to the fullness of his stature — the realization of his possibilities; the other is occupied with the Bible — the Word of God — aiming to elevate man as a moral and spiritual being to the ideal of his manhood. Just as Natural Science divides its work into sections and departments, so that by specialization it may be done thoroughly and well, so Theology, though in comparatively recent years, has divided its work with the same end in view. In this division of labor, it is scarcely necessary to say, the exegete stands to Theology exactly as the explorer to Science at large, or the microscopist to Biology, or the workman in the laboratory to Physics and Chemistry: he is the observer, the collector of facts. These facts he ascertains, describes, and hands over to his fellow-workers in other departments; to the historian to be classified and arranged in their chronological and natural (genetic) order; to the systematic theologian to be grouped in logical systems; to the pastor and preacher to be used in the practical relations of life. His branch is the discovery and interpretation of facts; this done, his distinctive task is ended. The question now is, what help can the spirit of the day give him in such a task?

Let it be observed: First — That the age is one of motion and progress. The life and activity of the world in everything, and, for our purpose we may say, especially in science and literature, is, to put it mildly, very rapid. Steam and electricity, the railroad and the telegraph, have not only made travel and communication easier and quicker, but they have sent their influence into the remoter spheres of art and literature, and by facilitating the execution, the multiplication, and the circulation of the products of art and letters, they have quickened activity in them. Thus in a certain way obstacles in the path of that subtle power, which works more quickly than steam or electricity — the human mind — have been removed, and freedom has been given to it to carry on its work as it never did before. And so progress, which took centuries for its consummation, is now being accomplished in years. Neither is intellectual work, as in the days of old, carried on in seclusion. The worker enters his study from a world busy with its myriad forms of life; these he cannot escape if he would, and somehow does not attempt to avoid; but as if fascinated by them, he plants his study in their very midst. Our largest institutions of learning are gravitating toward the centers of active life, the great cities. Thus the very blood as it courses through the veins of the student carries the lingering influence of life and action, and prompts him to impatience, to increased energy, and economy of time. And this not only in other forms of literary work, but also in what once was thought to be the furthest away from the dread influence of the world — the study of the Scriptures. In fact, the influence is no longer dreaded. Why should it be? Why should the student of God's word dread movement and life? Far from hindering and confusing, it has greatly helped him. Look at the accumulation during this century of materials for the criticism of the text of the New Testament; it has only served to make the basis of New Testament study surer by furnishing a reliable and pure text, the most essential, the most preliminary of all its parts. Or look at the documents recently brought to light: the "Teaching of the Twelve Disciples," the translations of Tatian's Harmony into Armenian and Arabic, the original of Barnabas' Epistle, the Clementine Homilies in full, the Clementine Epistles, and the work of Hippolytus "Against All Heresies," the Syriac recensions of the Ignatian Epistles — all these discovered within fifty years, half of them within fifteen years; what a stream of light they have thrown on the knotty problems connected with the origin, the purpose, and interpretation of the New Testament writings. Or again, look at the collations from

the writings of the early interpreters of the Gospel, and the translations of these into the modern languages. How much help may be derived from them in carrying on the study of the New Testament! Their nearness in point of time to the date of the origin of the Gospel, betokens an acquaintance with customs and spirit, and a consequent clearness of vision, that must aid the student; and even their errors in method can only show wherein the dangers of the interpreter await him. Or again, look at the archæological and topographical explorations that have helped to fix long debated locations and illumine doubtful passages. All these acquisitions have led far toward the center of vision, in the New Testament Scriptures. Sometimes this progress is said to be the residue of conflict with unbelieving criticism. Without denying that such conflict has forced much helpful thought and activity, we may more truly say that both believing and unbelieving workers have been actuated measurably by the aggressive, progressive, enterprising restlessness of the times.

Some have looked at these and similar movements with timid eyes. Movement, they have said, is not always progress, nor is the novel and startling always the true. Others have launched into them boldly, perhaps recklessly, and pressing into unknown seas they have made shipwreck of their faith. Two sections of the world look upon everything new in two different ways exactly opposed to one another, both wrong in their extreme forms, and both right as tempered and modified by one another, and at the point where they meet and blend. The first, restless, impatient with settled forms, takes novelty as a recommendation and a badge of truth. *A priori*, what has just appeared is the fruition of long processes, and therefore right until proved to be wrong; refusal to worship it is effete, antiquated, moribund, obsolescent. On the other hand, there are those who, satisfied too easily with what they hold, see not the necessity for change; they look upon progress with suspicion. They say, "let well enough alone." In view of these contradictory tendencies, it behooves the scientific investigator to watch lest he clog the way to true progress, on the one hand, by a fanatical adherence to the old, after it has been proved wrong; or lead and be led to ruin, as a scholar and as a human being, by readily falling in with every new theory, or even by giving it the presumptive right against the old. But the special danger of our age is from the tendency to accept the novel too rashly. Are not all things making rapid progress? Why should we not keep pace with other departments of science? Questions such as these, un-

consciously or consciously entertained, lead many to an unreasoning radicalism. In our field especially, this tendency leads to the reversal of the natural order of things, to the demand that the old and existing order of truth shall show its consistency with the new or yield, instead of asking for due credentials from the new. Let us insist on it that that which has been accepted for a long while and proved a source of comfort and a means of guidance, has some foundation of truth hidden away from us, perhaps, by the lapse of time, but sufficiently strong to have enabled it to stand; that it cannot be rejected without danger to the cause of truth, except on sufficient evidence and after mature and thorough discussion. No new discovery is entitled to a supreme place in our systems until it has proved its right thereto by a complete and universal confutation of all that may be inconsistent or opposed to it in the already existing system; until it has exchanged friendly words of greeting with its predecessors, or, if need be, crossed swords and overcome. We speak of Galileo as of a great man and a martyr to science, and we do well; but when we become inordinate in our denunciations of those who stood in his way, and condemn them without having a clear conception of their fault; when we expect them to have received the truth, as truth simply, because Galileo announced it as a novel and startling discovery, in spite of its apparent or real inconsistency with the body of their former knowledge, we commit a grave offense against the rights of existing truth.

True progress must from the nature of the case be the result of slow processes. The most violent revolutions in politics not only, but in science and art, are the outbursts not of sudden thoughts and feelings, but of long and slow growths. They are not the happy thoughts of individuals so much as the distinct and articulate utterance of that which has been in process of preparation in the minds of men through long ages.

These general principles acquire special significance when we come to the interpretation of the New Testament writings. Here, if anywhere, the facts and principles which should revolutionize the existing state of affairs must be the work not of one individual nor the outcome of a single mental act, but the residue of a long, slow, and painful process. For this is not a sphere which has come to the attention of this age, like some of the natural sciences, within the memory of living men, in which every step forward must be largely tentative. It is rather a sphere in which men have labored for long and weary centuries; we are in duty bound to examine the manner and

result of their labors, to test the principles on which it was carried on, to traverse the route trodden by them and determine its bearings. To ignore this work, to underestimate the acumen and honesty of past students, and with a masterly stroke of the pen to consign the result to oblivion, is a sign of arrogance, not of scholarship. True scholarship will heed both parts of the injunction, which is as rational as it is scriptural, to "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good." Hold fast that which has proved itself good until something better offers. Never give up, except on irrefragable proof, what has been satisfactory to the workers of the past, who toiled and sacrificed more heroically than any modern scholars know how to do or have any opportunity of doing. If this is traditionalism, then we may cheerfully accept the name, and confidently claim that such traditionalism is not only consistent with progress, but that it is the true progressive spirit, as opposed to the hasty acceptance of crude and undigested views under the influence of the mere desire to advance.

We may now go a step further and say that special caution is necessary in dealing with the Scriptures. For although as a literary and historical product theoretically they are to be treated exactly as other writings, we cannot ignore the fact that they are in practice never so treated. The existence of the miraculous in their accounts makes naturalistic critics and interpreters infinitely more careful, yes, exacting in their demands for evidences of authenticity. What would be perfectly satisfactory evidence in establishing the authorship of Horace or Plato is set aside as absolutely inadequate when a work claims to be St. Paul's or St. John's. But if the content thus prejudice the case on one side, why should not the effects produced by these writings in the world, with their undoubted beneficent influence, prejudice it in another way. Just as exorbitant demands for credentials are made and met, why should not the claim be heeded that they be not experimented with or hastily treated? They have been held in such estimation as to make it perilous to the faith of many to disturb existing opinions about them. It is of course the duty of the scholar to face this danger when he is sure of his ground, but it is not always certain that change will lead to improvement; and so it behooves him to wait until his results are something more than guesses before insisting on their acceptance. If, as is said, "fools rush in where angels fear to tread," it becomes the wise scholar not to enact the part of the fool. And we can urge this the more earnestly: —

II. Because the age we live in furnishes the safeguard through its own scientific method. The development of the natural sciences, largely within this century, and the attainment of reliable results in them through inductive processes of research, have impressed investigators in every field of labor with the validity and value of these methods not only, but also with the feasibility and wisdom of adopting them in other spheres; hence history has been and is being rewritten within our days on this new basis; hence also such a branch of study as psychology is being submitted to the process of reconstruction with the scientific method as the means of rebuilding. It is not therefore strange that the circle of the theological sciences should be called upon to examine their stock of acquisition from the past; to modify, if necessary, the results attained and bring them within the range of scientific expression; to change at any rate the process of work so as to secure the same clearness, order, and scientific reliability which other branches of study have obtained. Only a stubborn, and not the truth-loving conservatism, will fail to heed this voice and adopt its suggestion. The features of the scientific method commend it to the seeker of truth, and are these, viz.:

1. Absence of *a priori* bias in approaching the subject to be investigated. Bias here does not of course mean interest. Interest, even love amounting to enthusiasm, is helpful; it is certainly better than a cold and apathetic disposition in the student. Nor does absence of bias exclude working hypotheses, as purely tentative and provisional affairs, to be corrected or rejected, as the facts may demand during the course of investigation. Nor again, can the term bias include the same elements throughout an investigation, or mean the same thing under all circumstances. At different stages in the progress of research it must mean more or less. For certain stages of investigation all that has been discovered and established on a sound basis must be a stepping stone for further progress; it would be worse than folly not to keep it in mind, as a sort of prejudice in prosecuting the work. For the astronomers of the Lick observatory it would be raving madness not to approach their task with the positive assurance that the Copernican theory of the solar system is true, or that the formulæ of Newton and Kepler on the law of gravitation are proved. So in investigating the question whether the Bible is or is not the Word of God — a question which in the ordinarily accepted sense belongs, if at all, to the earliest stage of exegesis — this freedom from bias would require the investigator to come with his mind entirely divested of prejudice in favor of the actual occurrence of mir-

acles in the world, of which God's giving His Word would be one, or against their possibility; it would call on him to set aside for the time his philosophical notions, to survey the whole field, to take account of all the facts, giving each its due weight, and then to build his theory on the facts thus found; not to assume that there have been supernatural occurrences, and proceed to seek evidence for the assumption; nor, as skeptics are doing, start with the postulate that miracles are impossible, their acceptance unscientific and uncritical, and proceed to the facts, of course not to interpret, but simply to explain them away. It will not avail to say that this prejudice is scientific because based on natural science. For this claim, aside from the fact that it uses the term scientific in a narrow and confusing sense, is not true. Natural science has simply nothing to say on the subject of the supernatural; and to this position, always held by believing scientists, the better class of non-Christians, have seen themselves compelled to come. The possibility of the supernatural though extra-scientific (using the word scientific in the narrow sense), is not unscientific (again in the narrow sense); rather in the highest and broadest sense, it is scientific to admit the possibility of miracles, and unscientific to deny it. Now, when we have found by such an introductory investigation that the New Testament writings are what they claim to be, it becomes not only a dereliction of duty to discard the fact, but an altogether unscientific procedure. It must enter into our apparatus. It must have at least a twofold effect on us: first, it must compel us, as we go further in our work, to seek for guidance from the Author of the Word; to approach it with a humble, prayerful spirit. Anything else would amount to cutting ourselves off from the only safe leadership in our exploration. Difficult as this is, and important as are the issues at stake, we cannot afford to neglect the assistance coming from a right attitude of mind and heart, in dealing with God's Word. Secondly, the conviction that the literary products before us are due principally to divine inspiration, must compel us to take the thought of inspiration into the subsequent stages of our research. The question we have to answer at every step and in view of every new fact is: "What is the exact and full meaning of this fact?" and it can only be answered properly by taking into account all the factors that have produced it. If divine influence is one of these, any answer made independently of the divine element must be defective. Hence it is easy enough to understand how, when an interpreter has been convinced that the New Testament is the work of men only, as such, he must explain its statements exactly as he

would any other literature; but it is impossible to account for the inconsistency of a Christian scholar, whose mind is made up that he is dealing with the Word of God, and who yet persists in leaving out the fact of inspiration from his exegesis. The scientist who believes in evolution, never leaves it out of his accounts of geology or biology.

To sum up: during the earliest stage of our work, scientific freedom from prejudice means everything; later, it means less and less, until in pure Exegesis it consists in putting aside preconception as to what the Word of God is or contains, and readiness to find in it just what has been put in it by its Author. If *a priori* theories held before are found there, as very probably some of them may be, well and good, but if not, *they* are to be corrected or surrendered, not the Word of God. This is honesty, scientific honesty, in which those who have adopted the so-called "Christian consciousness" theory cannot indulge very largely. It would disturb the results they have obtained through the application of their pet method.

2. After the mind has been prepared for its task it will meet a second requirement in the use of the modern method, *i. e.*, exactness in the observation of facts. This will include a minute examination of materials in detail, and a comprehensive and exhaustive grasp of all the material available. In the first of these particulars our lesson is learned from the microscope as used in the natural sciences. We have come to know that centers of vitality are imperceptible to the naked eye; whole cycles of facts that had escaped the observation of men before the use of the microscope were important to the utmost in their bearings; as they are taken into consideration now, they bid fair to revolutionize every department of natural science; they have done so with every branch of biology. History has felt the strength of this principle and sent its students deeper and closer into the life of events, and restated in truer terms its record of the world's life. A single neglected document brought to light has often proved more valuable in revealing the true and inner life of great movements than whole libraries on the external aspects of the same movements. Witness that outline, written in a sort of shorthand, of a sermon preached here in Hartford two hundred and fifty years ago, and deciphered by an eminent citizen of Hartford, Dr. J. Hammond Trumbull; in its scanty sentences it furnishes the key to the origin of the form of government under which we are living; it gives the true motives of those who founded it, and proves that with them began "the government of the people, by the people, for the people." And if minute and accurate research is thus significant in science and in history, how much

more so must it be in Biblical criticism and interpretation, where the facts to be examined are facts of language and thought, subject to a complicated and elaborate system of subtle laws, significant in their slightest variations. We cannot be too thorough in our analysis here, or too trenchant in our penetration. We cannot break up the elements we are investigating into too small sections for the purpose of satisfying this true and just claim of the scientific method. And, as if to indicate the will of Providence in the matter, the wonderful development of philological science in our days has opened more widely the door to thoroughness. We have now the assistance of a true science of philology, where not more than a century ago scholars were satisfied with conjecture. This is certainly as much of an indication to the Christian scholar of his duty as the removal of obstacles in the way of missionary work, or the occurrence of great crises is an indication to the Church that the time is ripe for vigorous work in evangelizing the world. And to emphasize the need of care and discrimination, let it be further observed that not every microscopic particle of bioplasm is a center of vitality, nor is every old and obscure scrap that may come to light the key to the intricacies of a great historical movement, nor every grammatical form or combination of words the expression of cardinal thought. Nor must we draw back because others in the infancy of our science, attempting to be minute and systematic, went astray into unwarranted allegorisms and fantastic delusions. Error there has certainly been in the past, and crudity; but instead of keeping us away, they should simply call forth vigorous effort to substitute that which is better and sounder.

Furthermore, the survey of the field must also be exhaustive. There is nothing more pernicious than the tendency to build large theories on a slender and one-sided collection of facts. How often this tendency has resulted in misleading vagaries and delayed true progress. How often systems have been built only to be pulled down, after a long and wasteful war as to their merits; and this simply because the builders had failed or refused to take into account large cycles of facts directly bearing on their theories. Why need we review the history of criticism, both lower and higher, to be convinced of this? One illustration will suffice. The higher criticism has built theory after theory of the origin and authorship of the earlier books of the Old Testament, only to have them pulled down with the very implements with which they had been constructed. The controversy is fierce and bitter even now over the last and most astounding of these theories; and when that is razed to the ground, as it must in its essential points

sooner or later, another and a more astounding will probably take its place. But meanwhile, how confidently we are told that this structure is now built on rock; that the scaffolding is already in process of taking down, and that the palace stands magnificent, aerial and perfect, the joy of the whole world (of higher critics, no doubt). It is a singular fact, however, and ominous as well as singular, that the very theorists who so confidently assert the triumph and permanency of these results complain constantly of the uncertainty of the Old Testament text, and propose to correct it by comparison with that of its ancient translations and by conjecture. But if the text be confused and corrupted, how can any far-reaching inferences be evolved from it? If it be true that the very data are uncertain, what becomes of the theories? The unsophisticated mind will suspect from this complaint that the data are not exactly what the theorist would like to have them.

3. Closely connected with and growing out of this feature of the scientific method, notice its third element, the correct interpretation of the facts it finds. Correct interpretation again is secured partly by a sound judgment and partly by the application of accepted tests. Of the necessity of sound judgment there never has been and can hardly be a doubt. The special point at which the modern method helps men in reaching reliable interpretations is the application of standard tests. As illustrating this, it would be interesting to rehearse the accounts of Prof. Tyndall's experiments with abiogenesis as given by himself. How patiently he watched over and repeated again and again the same experiments — dozens of times, some of them — taking more and more stringent measures each time to guard against all possible error, and notwithstanding the fact that they all pointed constantly to one conclusion, distrusting the result until all possible avenues of mistake had been shut off and the inference seemed unavoidable. Truth to the scientist is a mighty and revered name, and nothing may be dogmatically uttered in it, until it has been over and over again measured and sounded and weighed in the balance and *not* found wanting.

III. But we must pass to a third feature of our age as it affects our science — its practical character. With all its dangers when exaggerated, the influence of it, if duly regulated, is bound to be wholesome. It is bound to result in the pruning off of many vain speculations, castellated structures, and unnecessary hypotheses, some of

them imported from across the ocean, where, perhaps, not as much regard is had for practicality as on these shores. If the interpreter of the Bible heeds this voice, he will first of all take the spirit of practicality into the sphere of investigation, which means that he will not keep his common sense out of his study. As ministers, we call upon men to take their religion into the affairs of life; let us not as students neglect to take the practical common sense of life into the study. Criticism etymologically is, after all, the exercise of sound judgment, and as a faculty it is the result and constant attendant of practical tact. Ordinary common sense is its substratum and necessary prerequisite. Every good critic may not be actually a good business man or a successful statesman, but he would have made one if he had devoted himself to politics or commercial pursuits. The critical faculty necessary for the scholar is nothing but the business tact of the merchant developed in a different line, trained to see and pass upon another set of facts than those of business life. But it should not on this account be blinded to their practical bearings. Then, if the scholar heeds this call for practicality, he will have regard and cater to the actual need and capacity of the world. He will not allow himself to be so engrossed with the dignity and value of true scholarship as to lend a deaf ear to the demand for popular and easy interpretations of the Word of God. The hunger for the truth is great, and unless sound exegesis practicalizes and popularizes its results, this hunger will be met by cheap substitutes, which cannot but do harm. Let us not decry the popular Sunday-school lesson-leaf and cheap commentary until we have infused the spirit of practicality into our interpretations and brought these down to the needs of the people. But I leave this part of the subject with the full assurance that whatever I may say on it is but the feeble echo of the thoughts of this audience.

These are in brief some of the salutary influences exercised by modern thought and life on Bible exegesis. In submitting to these, our science incurs a debt. How shall it repay it? How shall it, as thus vitalized and quickened by contact with the forces of the day, bear fruit to feed the age? Out of the number of spheres which it must touch and help, we select three as pre-eminently needy of its influence — more so than others — more so than ever — these are Polemics, or controversial theology, Apologetics and the practical work.

I. And first of Polemics. Nothing is better known than the fact that in the attempt to systematize and formulate the doctrines of the Bible there have arisen, from time to time, differences of opinion, and that these differences have, in the providence of God, led to fierce conflicts, proverbial for their well-nigh savagery. It is equally well known that these controversies have not always raged over the same parts of the system of biblical truth; that every age has seen the battlefields shifted. No sooner did the Gospel fairly take root, than questions as to its relations to the old law began to agitate the world; these relations adjusted, there arose long and animated debates on the divinity of the Lord, on the personality of the Holy Spirit, the nature of sin, the atonement, the Divine sovereignty, and the free will of man. It seems as if it were a law of Providence that progress should be the product of strife. As in a living organism the centers of life change constantly, so in theology the crossing of swords takes place on different battlefields. The change is occasioned by the accession of new material to the sum of the world's knowledge. Each accession calls for a re-adjustment of the relations of the old to the new, and of the parts of the old to each other. Hence each generation has its individual disputes. To fight in the lines of a hundred years ago would be in the highest degree Quixotic. The questions which were mooted during the early decades of the present century, on dogmatics, liturgics, and church government are no longer the subjects of such animated discussion as they aroused then; without losing their interest to the historian, they have been stripped of their pivotal, radical aspect to the controversialist. Others have sprung up to take their place and for a time to monopolize the attention of thinkers. The scene of activity has shifted. Parties have been largely recast. Even such discussions as made all New England alive with interest between Hopkinsians and their opponents, Tylerists and Taylorists, Bushnellists and anti-Bushnellists, are largely matters of the past. They have left their imprint on the thoughts of the present. No doubt they live in literature and in the memory of many veterans, who witnessed them and took part in them; the smoke and dust still linger on the field, but the warriors have either departed or turned their attention to other affairs; and the issues for which they fought, if not finally decided, rest for a season until a new impulse stirs men to take them up again. The questions of our day are different; to our minds quite as important; indeed, much more so. It behooves, therefore, the polemic theology of our day to seek new ammunition from a sound exegesis. It is of small consequence whether the re-

sult be change in the forms and formulæ already attained. Whether it amounts to sufficient gain to warrant the revision of creeds or not, whatever results from controversy carried on upon the basis of a sound interpretation of the Scriptures, whether depth or breadth or strength or clearness must be looked upon as an undoubted gain. There are creed-making epochs in the history of the world as there are liturgy-making epochs. Not every age furnishes the taste and sensibility that will put the net result of progress into forms of worship and thus furnish the most acceptable and uplifting liturgical expressions; nor does every age produce a mind or minds capable of expressing through the clearest and truest words the crystallized result of past investigation and controversy in acceptable creeds. Nevertheless, the effort to improve liturgy and creed goes on. Like the life of the plant it moves continually, though only at stated intervals it may be possible to mark the amount of growth. Let controversy go on then, but let every shot fired in the warfare be loaded from the great arsenal of sound scriptural interpretation. If the Scriptures are what they claim to be, no other storehouse of ammunition and weapons is to be found anywhere, and the weapons drawn from the Scriptures may be used without fear; they are safe for attack or defence.

II. But a louder cry for ammunition in our day comes from another battlefield; a battlefield, the din and clamor of whose warfare bids fair to drown for a time that of pure controversy; it is the warfare between Christian belief and modern unbelief. The authority of the Scriptures, and the validity of that authority, are the points at issue. And both sides in this contest, strange as it may seem, appeal to the facts, as revealed by a thorough examination of the Scriptures themselves. What do the Scriptures claim to be? Is their claim well founded? These questions cannot be answered satisfactorily without a careful, fearless, and searching investigation. The Bible has been long accepted as a unique production; how is this claim borne out by a comparison of its contents with those of other human literary productions? Here we have the task, which the higher criticism proposes to itself; and together with it the nicer task of defining inspiration. And this task the modern apologetic has to undertake and carry on with the light, which a sound exegesis may throw on its work. There was a time when petty objections were made to the Christian Scriptures on the ground of apparent inconsistencies and inaccuracies to be found in theory. These furnished a great part of the apologist's line of attack. Now, not to mention the fact that answers

made to rude objections formulated fifty or even fifteen years ago are not as satisfactory as answers that can be made to-day in the light of a fuller discussion and larger archæological research,—now, the point assailed is the foundation itself. About it the conflict has been raging; and it has been going on now long enough to show the usefulness of continuing it to the bitter end. Certainly the believing side has not been the loser through it. Claim after claim made by the opponent has been shown to be hollow by research and reasoning, and the battle has narrowed down to a limited field. It may be too sanguine to say that more such work as has been done within the last fifty years would compel the enemy to surrender completely; but it is certainly true that skeptical criticism has vastly moderated its claims, so much so, that little now is lacking for a complete demonstration that the New Testament Scriptures, at least from the historico-critical standpoint, are impregnable.

No doubt it is customary in our day, in certain quarters, to speak slightingly of the historic argument, as if the apologetic of the day must be based not on it, but on the internal argument, the intrinsic worth and appeal of the Gospel to the human heart. So far as this fashionable tendency has a positive element it may be readily assented to. If it means that emphasis must be laid as never before on the internal adaptation of Christianity to the human need, it expresses a profound truth. The force with which the Gospel comes to men grows as the experience of the world with it becomes larger and fuller. Its inner meaning is better known than ever it was, and naturally it speaks to the heart more convincingly. But if on the other hand this tendency means that the argument from miracle and prophecy must be abandoned, there never was a more groundless demand than it makes. The historic argument is as true and valid and strong as ever, and stronger by as much as historic certainty is enhanced through progress in historic method. But if the apologist, in compliance with the demand to insist on the intrinsic side of his subject, shall attempt to strengthen his position on that side, what more potent ally will he find than the exegesis which will furnish him with a profounder and a more exhaustive understanding of the Gospel? Witness as a result pertaining to this point, the triumphs of the Christological idea in our days. Christ's life was made the point of dispute by unbelievers; immediately Christ's life, Christ's words, Christ's character, His nature, His person, His powers, these as constituting the very core and life of Christianity, were made the subject of a minute and careful examination by

New Testament exegesis. As a consequence, the stream which began in Apologetics has overflowed and fertilized every other field. The Christological idea has grown to such proportions that the Church may well think she never knew Christ as well before in her history.

III. But we must close with a few words on the last, the largest and most important field where the results of our work are to be used — the ordinary duties of the ministry. We have already spoken of the need of practicality in study. We have said that the student must meet the practical man on his own ground. Let us now insist on it that there he must press him to accept the results of study. Too often the temptation comes nowadays to look upon study in general as secondary to work. However this temptation may be met by other study, the study of the Scriptures must face it with a determined and unyielding front. We do not forget the facts in the case. The demands on the minister's time and energy from every conceivable quarter are immense and persistent. But instead of compelling him to neglect his Greek Testament, the fact ought to lead to the employment of an assistant, to the division of the parish, to any other practical plan that practical men can devise, rather than the unpractical and impracticable scheme of preaching and pastoral visitation without constant communion with the very source and groundwork of his office. The more pressing the needs of the field, the more fully should the laborer equip himself with the implements of his labor. The louder the demands on the pastor for work, the better should he prepare himself for it, first by personal communion with the Lord of the harvest and then by a careful study of the Word of Truth, the more skillfully he should be able to handle the Scriptures, and the more familiar he should be with all their riches and powers and capacities.

We might as well attempt to raise roses on the bush which has been cut off from its roots, as try to enforce the doctrines, practices, and methods of the Bible without a thorough, minute, repeated, and independent reinforcement from its store of facts. Why need we point at this time to history, instructive as it is familiar in this respect? Whenever and wherever the interpretation of the Word has been undertaken and carried on sincerely and persistently, the consequence has been moral and religious healthfulness; wherever and whenever its authority has been disputed or ignored, wherever it has been or is carried on upon a defective isagogical and exegetical system, the re-

sult is moral and religious laxity. The time is past when a minister could base a sermon or enforce a word of exhortation on a misunderstood and misapplied text of Scripture without being detected and despised for it; the day has not come, will never come, when it will be acceptable to the healthy conscience for the minister to prove in the first half of his sermon that the words of his text are not true, and then proceed to show the lessons to be drawn from them. Juggling with the basis of religious instruction cannot be tolerated long, whether it be the result of ignorance or arrogance. If the world is to be won to Christ it must be through His Word, and the better His Word is known and understood by those who are to use it the easier the task will be and the sooner success will follow.

So then, look at it from whatever point of view we will, the age enters into our work as a giver and a taker; let us see to it that it gives us nothing but elements of health and vigor, and that it takes the light and life which will keep it thoughtful and devout, its faith unshaken, its Christian energy unabated.

And to this end may we always devoutly look up unto Him who hath intrusted us with His own living oracles.